

LIFE



The wild
spooky
jungle
of Sumatra

Connally
ranch part
for Nixon

Eleanor
Roosevelt
as Whistler's
Mother

HUGGABLE
ALPHABET

A BRIGHT NEW WAY
TO LEARN LETTERS

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RETREAT

A bright new way to learn letters

The Huggables



Learning the letters and imitating their sounds (above) are the primary goals of the Huggable program. But words come naturally, too, as the children pick a familiar combination (right) to help show off their spelling know-how.

Plastic, inflatable and not quite child-size, the Huggables are what kindergarteners refer to as "the letter people." They are the practically irresistible principal ingredients of a reading readiness program called Alpha Time. The Huggables were created by New Dimensions in Education and follow the success of Alpha One, a reading program for first-graders NDE developed two years ago. They have aroused much interest among educators. By next year more than 4,000 classrooms, like this one in Wyandanch, N.Y.'s Taukomas School, will have the \$395 letter people program. Each of the 26 figures boldly exhibits the letter which is not only its name but also the key to some identifying characteristic: Mr. F, for example, has immense Funny Feet while Mr. H has Horrible green Hair. (The vowels are all female characters, it turns out, and the consonants are all males.) The program also includes books and songs about each Huggable stressing the specific letter and its sound. "The outstanding feature of this program is its ability to motivate," says Taukomas School Principal Richard Voso. "I've yet to see a child who's been turned off by it."



The classroom conversation turned to "love" and as the Huggables spelled out the word (top), the letter learners swapped ideas about what it meant: kisses and squeezes were mentioned. But Craig, standing behind Miss E, didn't contribute. "I don't have a girl friend, so I don't know what love means," he explained. When his teacher, Wendy Meehan, applied for the job (above), Craig found a new use for his Huggable (right)—a perfect hiding place for a very embarrassed face.



*An exercise in spelling
becomes a lesson about love*



In a display of alphabetical enthusiasm, the children join ranks on the school lawn and, using all 26 Huggables (and more), spell the traditional typing exercise.